

Kuralt, Charles Bishop ^[1]

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by Jill Snider and Noah Huffman, 2007
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10 Sep 1934 - 4 Jul 1997

Charles Bishop Kuralt, award-winning newspaper, radio, and television journalist and best-selling author, was born 10 September 1934 in [Wilmington](#) ^[2], N.C., the first child of Wallace Hamilton Kuralt, Sr., of Massachusetts and Ina Bishop Kuralt of rural [Onslow County](#) ^[3], N.C. Wallace Kuralt, a graduate of the [University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill](#) ^[4], pursued a career in social work, and Ina Kuralt found work as a schoolteacher. Charles spent his early years on his maternal grandparents' tobacco farm in Onslow County. The family, which expanded eventually to include Charles' two siblings, Wallace Hamilton Kuralt, Jr., and Catherine Kuralt Harris, then undertook a series of moves in response to career opportunities for his father. Living in Washington, N.C., Stedman, N.C., and Atlanta, Ga., the Kuralts finally settled in [Charlotte](#) ^[5] in the mid 1940s, where Wallace Kuralt became director of the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services.

Charles attended Charlotte's Alexander Graham Junior High School from 1945 to 1948, where he received his first training in journalism in a class taught by Anne Batten. He also wrote a column, "The Kaleidoscope," for the school's newspaper. At the early age of fourteen, Kuralt began broadcasting baseball and football games for WAYS radio in Charlotte. After his graduation from Central High School in 1951 he also spent a summer as a disc jockey at the station. In addition, Kuralt proved a prize-winning writer, winning a national Voice of Democracy speech writing contest in 1949.

In the fall of 1951, Kuralt entered the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, where he majored in history and served as editor of the *Daily Tar Heel*. He also worked for WUNC radio, for WCHL in Chapel Hill, and for a Sanford radio station. Graduating in 1955, Kuralt returned to Charlotte to join the staff of the *Charlotte News*, where he wrote news and human interest stories, and penned a regular column, "People," for which he won the Ernie Pyle Memorial Award in 1956.

In May 1957, Kuralt accepted an offer from CBS to join their New York radio staff as a writer for *Douglas Edwards With the News*. In 1958, he sought and received a job on the *CBS Television News* assignment desk. One year later, CBS named Kuralt a full correspondent, and chose him to host the newly created weekly television show *Eyewitness to History*. During his career with CBS, which spanned 37 years, Kuralt worked on a variety of radio and television series and projects. He focused, during his early career, on radio news and commentary (*CBS Radio News* and *Dimensions on Health*) and television documentaries and special reports (*CBS Reports*, *Eyewitness to History*, and *CBS News Specials*). He gathered much of the background material for these programs as the network's News Chief for Latin America (1961-October 1962), News Chief for the West Coast (October 1962-1963), and as a special assignment correspondent for the CBS New York Bureau (1964-1967). In 1967, Kuralt traveled to Eureka, Canada, to cover the Plaisted Polar Expedition. His first book, *To the Top of the World*, published in 1968, resulted from his work there.

Kuralt was best known for his *On the Road* series, which began as a segment on the *CBS Evening News* with Walter Cronkite in October 1967 and did not end, except for a brief interruption in 1980-1982 when he anchored the *CBS Morning News*, until 1988, and for his long-running television series *Sunday Morning* (1979-1994). He also served as host of a number of other CBS television programs, including *Adventure* and *The American Parade*. Material from his many years of traveling the countryside seeking out human interest stories provided the background for a number of books, including *Dateline America* (1979), based on a radio show of the same name that served as a companion to the *On the Road* broadcasts; *On the Road with Charles Kuralt* (1985), and his autobiographical *A Life on the Road* (1990).

During his career at CBS, Kuralt also proved a popular speaker on campus and organizational circuits and won a variety of awards for his television work, including three George Foster Peabody Awards and thirteen Emmy Awards. He retired in April 1994, but continued to work in the field of journalism, making a trek across America in 1994-1995 to gather material for his book *Charles Kuralt's America* (1995). He also kept a full calendar of speaking engagements and appearances for causes he supported; completed a number of narration projects; and, in 1995, became owner of WELY, a radio station in Ely, Minn.

In 1952, Kuralt married Sory Guthery of Charlotte. They had two children, Susan Guthery Bowers and Lisa Bowers White. After the Kuralts divorced, Sory married Henry Bowers, and Lisa and Susan adopted their stepfather's surname. In 1962, Kuralt married Suzanne (Petie) Folsom Baird Kuralt (b. 1929), to whom he was married until his death on 4 July 1997.

References:

Charles Kuralt Collection #4882, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04882/#d1e560> ^[6]

Additional Resources:

"Charles Kuralt remembered," *Our State*, January 1999. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/our-state/909062?item=909162> [7]

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